

VZCZCXRO9707

RR RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD RUEHRS RUEHTM
DE RUEHME #1269/01 1281329
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 081329Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6413
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUEHXQ/ALL EUROPEAN UNION POST COLLECTIVE
RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 3835
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0503
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2590
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0200
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1128

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 MEXICO 001269

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/MEX, WHA/PDA, STATE FOR OES/IHB, PA, CAPRESS;
STATE FOR MED/DASHO (MCFADDEN, RINALDO, KEYES); STATE FOR
MED/DIR (PENNER); STATE FOR DS/IP/WHA; CDC FOR
CCID/NCPDCID, CCID/NCIRD AND COGH/DPPPC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC CVIS CASC KSCA TBIO MX

SUBJECT: SITREP 14 - H1N1 FLU OUTBREAK IN MEXICO CITY

REF: MEXICO 1250 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) SUMMARY

The GOM announced that the number of confirmed H1N1 cases now stands at 1,204 including 44 fatalities. The two additional fatalities were from analysis of backlogged samples. Mexico City reduced its alert level from orange to yellow which means that normal business and social operations may continue with strict adherence to government sanitation guidelines.

12. (U) FEDERAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: With the gradual return to normalcy, the President and the Health minister warned that the influenza outbreak was still a very serious threat to public health and urged continued adherence to government prescribed sanitation precautions. The President also remarked that the demonization of Mexican products and people was unwarranted and described the return of the Mexican aid ship from Haiti as Q&unnecessary.Q8

MEXICO CITY GOVERNMENT: The Mexico City government decided to reduce the alert system from orange to yellow. That means that gyms, bars, etc. can open. Soccer matches will still be played without an audience. Work places, restaurants, theaters will have screening systems to ask a client with symptoms to leave the establishment. All places of business are to maintain strict adherence to the government's sanitation guidelines and provide ample access to hand washing or sanitizing facilities. High school and university students returned to classes.

13. (U) ACTIONS BY NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

No new information to report.

14. (SBU) STATISTICS

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: Health Secretary Cordova announced in a May 7 press conference that the number of confirmed cases now stands at 1204 that includes 44 fatalities. The two latest fatalities were a woman in San Luis Potosi and a man in Tlaxcala. The Health Secretary clarified that these were not new cases but that rather dated cases that had just been confirmed following an analysis of samples. Cordoba further indicated that the percentage breakdown of fatalities stands at 49.5% women and 50.5% men.

STATE BY STATE: The GOM did not issue state by state numbers of confirmed cases on May 7. The table below reflects the current state-by-state breakdown of fatalities:

CHIAPAS Q) 1
DF - 29
HIDALGO Q) 1
MEXICO STATE Q) 5
OAXACA Q) 1
SAN LUIS POTOSI Q) 4
TLAXCALA - 3

15. (SBU) MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The Health Unit has seen a decrease in the volume of suspected cases of H1N1 influenza, however continues to test when presented with flu-like symptoms. It registered no additional confirmations or probable cases.

MEXICO 00001269 002 OF 006

16. (U) SECURITY ISSUES

No new information to report.

17. (U) CONSULAR ISSUES

Call volume to the Embassy switchboard returned to normal levels with 56 calls regarding visa and passport issues received. In the 24 hours through 0700 AM May 7, the switchboard received 0 H1N1 related inquiries.

Since the cessation of visa operations, approximately 10,000 visa appointments were cancelled nationwide. However, Consular operations do not expect a significant increase in backlog. Rescheduling will be conducted by the scheduling service.

18. (U) CONSULATE ISSUES

CIUDAD JUAREZ: The Chihuahua State Secretary of Health and the El Paso Health Department report that there are 4 confirmed cases of H1N1 virus in Chihuahua and 7 confirmed cases in El Paso. More than 216,000 high school and university students in the state returned to classes on May 17. State health authorities disclosed to Post that the number of possible H1N1 cases may increase in the coming weeks as schools resume normal operations.

With the exception of bars and nightclubs - which remain closed - most businesses and government services are now operating on a normal schedule. Restaurant-bars and event halls are open, but must close by 1 a.m. and limit the number of patrons to 50 percent of normal capacity. There is growing disquiet among leaders in the service sector, who argue that local and state authorities have not adequately explained their decision regarding business closures and suspended hours.

Occupancy rates at a selected sample of Juarez hotels are approximately 30 percent lower than the week prior to the

H1N1 outbreak. Several managers of hotels that do not cater to visa applicants cited occupancy rates as low as 14 percent in recent days. This figure contrasts with hotels in the immediate vicinity of the U.S. Consulate General in Ciudad Juarez, which report an average occupancy rate of 25 percent.

The Director for Border Tourism in Ciudad Juarez asserted that the H1N1 outbreak, combined with the high levels of narco-violence, threaten to stigmatize the Chihuahua tourism industry.

On May 7, non-immigrant visa services resumed with a very small number of applicants. Normal NIV operations will begin on May 11 and immigrant visa services will begin on May 18.

GUADALAJARA: Despite having maintained that Jalisco remained H1N1 free, Jalisco Governor Gonzalez announced at a press conference yesterday afternoon that Jalisco now has 15 confirmed cases. He stated that they were diagnosed as potential cases early and the patients will be able to return to their normal routines soon. The ages of the patients range from 12 to 40, and the individuals are from different families and different neighborhoods. Jalisco still has additional cases pending confirmation. At this point, the number of infections in Jalisco only represents 1.34 percent of the total in Mexico.

Most universities opened today, and while students and employees were not required to wear masks, they were encouraged to do so. Additional preventative measures consisted of pre-entry screening in the form of a series of questions, similar to what has been used in airports, to

MEXICO 00001269 003 OF 006

identify potentially infected individuals. Schools and public institutions, including public transportation, have implemented a routine cleaning program to disinfect all public areas. Some public schools are waiting for sanitary supplies to arrive.

The Consejo Empresarial Mexicano de Comercio (COMCE) reported today that already low export numbers from Jalisco have diminished further due to the H1N1 virus. Exports were already down due to the economic situation; numbers recorded prior to the outbreak marked a decrease from last year of between 15 and 18 percent. COMCE announced that it expects another 10 percent decrease due the outbreak. It cited shipments received at ports, such as Los Angeles, that undergo a strict inspection process delaying delivery by 24 to 48 hours. COMCE asserts that a recovery will take up to six months. Overall, it expects exports to decrease 15 percent in 2009 in comparison with 2008.

NIV scheduled 200 appointments for today, but only 40 slots were filled. Additional appointments are open for tomorrow. The NIV section is prepared for a full schedule of appointments on Monday, but, due to the flu, does not anticipate that all slots will be filled. ACS again fielded a full schedule of appointments, but with a significant drop in emergency requests.

HERMOSILLO: No new information to report.

MATAMOROS: No new information to report.

MERIDA: Hotel occupancy in Cancun is now at 20 percent and six hotels have announced temporary closure (about half through May 15 and the rest through May 31). The hotels that are temporarily closing have multiple properties and are consolidating their diminished volume of occupants into a fewer number of hotels.

The Governors of Yucatan and Quintana Roo separately met with representatives from the cruise ship industry to urge their return to Mexico sooner than the June 15th date previously announced.

Throughout the peninsula, universities and high schools, cinemas, shopping centers, and archeological sites are reopening. There is a noticeably lower level of activity

throughout the region. Local press reports predict a slow recovery and estimate that low demand will continue in the tourist sector for at least six months.

The Consulate opened limited visa services today with capacity for 100 applicants. Thirty were scheduled.

However, only one applicant appeared for his interview.

MONTERREY: State governments emphasized that they are open for business, even as they clean schools and urge citizens not to lower their guard. In the states of San Luis Potosi and Durango the hospitals report that consultations about flu have stabilized, or in the case of Durango they have decreased 10%. However, since the medical consultations in Durango had increased 50%, they are still 40% higher than normal. In Nuevo Leon, SNTE teachers union head Elba Ester Gordillo said that schools would still be closed for teachersQ, day May 15, but she may agree to extending classes. Nuevo Leon Governor Gonzalez Paras stated that citizens and businesses acted responsibly, and he urged a return to a normal life in the community. In San Luis Potosi (SLP) the government again publicized that the state hospitals will soon have the capability to analyze flu samples without sending them to Mexico City. The governments also seek to address the impact on business. Zacatecas proposed a state plan to lower taxes to help hotels, nightclubs and other affected businesses. The federal government plans to fine 71 businesses in Coahuila that did not close May 1-5.

The number of confirmed cases climbed in several states. In Nuevo Leon there are now nine confirmed H1N1 cases (up from four yesterday). The laboratory samples for these patients

MEXICO 00001269 004 OF 006

were taken between April 23-26 and Nuevo Leon just found out the results. All are recovering, and two received anti-viral medication. In San Luis Potosi (SLP), four people died from H1N1 virus (up from one). SLP has 96 cases of H1N1 flu, 227 cases have not been analyzed, and 44 people remain hospitalized. Zacatecas still has 33 confirmed H1N1 cases. Durango did not update the number of confirmed cases, but as a precaution 41 people are on anti-viral medication. Coahuila proudly proclaims that it is still H1N1 free.

A Monterrey tourism official stated that hotel occupancy is at 20%, vs 60% normally. He also stressed that the May 1-5 weekend is a big one for regional tourism, and now that has been lost. Tourist operators have also seen companies cancel business meetings through June, although events are still on for July onward. The Nuevo Leon maquila association continued to complain about the four businesses that were fined for opening from May 1-5. Yale University has also decided to cancel its summer exchange program with Monterrey TEC University for 2009. In addition, approximately 25 flights to San Luis Potosi have been cancelled because people were Q&afraidQ8 to visit the tourist sites there.

In Consulate Monterrey, there are no suspected cases of H1N1 flu among FSO or LES staff and their dependents. About 200 NIV applicants will come in today to the consular section for rescheduled interviews. The consular section is also quickly rescheduling H2 interviews for next week. 1,174 H2 interviews are scheduled for enrollment at the ASC Monday May 11 and consular interviews Tuesday May 12.

NOGALES: No new information to report.

NUEVO LAREDO: The public is calm and many people continue to wear face masks but in decreasing numbers. Public awareness remains high regarding the possibility of contacting H1N1 but public anxiety seems to be decreasing. There are still no confirmed cases of H1N1 in Neuvo Laredo.

TIJUANA: The number of confirmed cases for Baja California remains at 18. According to the state health secretary, eleven of the 18 are women and the age range of cases extends

from six months to 37 years of age. He also repeated that there is no known connection among the victims. Schools are set to re-open in keeping with the scheduled outlined by the federal government. In preparation, all schools are being cleaned and disinfected prior to opening. Sectors of the state are beginning to evaluate the economic losses that the flu alert has caused or contributed to. There was reportedly a 90% drop in hotel occupancy, a 10% drop in consumer purchases, a 70-80 % drop in service industry businesses, and essentially no business in the tourism sector along Avenida Revoluci"n. The president of CANACO stated that the losses can be tied to the measures imposed by the federal government to combat the flu epidemic, even though it at no moment affected Tijuana. He suggested that the measures taken were Q&exaggeratedQ8, comparing the response in Tijuana to that of San Diego. Consular is resuming normal services, with a phase-in of NIV appointments this week and a full re-opening next week.

MEXICO CITY CONSULAR DISTRICT: No new information to report.

¶9. (U) MEDIA REACTION/GENERAL POPULATION SENTIMENTS

On May 7, the top item was the reopening of businesses in Mexico City. The local Scientific and Sanitation Vigilance Committee lowered the alert level and announced that all businesses, including movie theaters, night clubs, stadiums, auditoriums, gyms, etc. in Mexico City could resume their services entirely. In spite of the optimism, President Calderon and Health Secretary Cordova once again reminded the public that the virus is not yet under control and that high

MEXICO 00001269 005 OF 006

sanitation standards must be maintained. Secretary Cordova even said that it will take weeks to control the virus. Another relevant topic in the coverage was that President Calderon once again criticized foreign governments for the actions they have taken to prevent the A H1N1 flu. During a speech in Michoacan, he reproached Haiti for rejecting a Mexican ship with humanitarian aid. In contrast, most media continue reporting of good relations between Mexico and the U.S. As one columnist noted, Q&While our Latin American Q brothersQ, have turned their back on us during this difficult time, Barack Obama has shown us more than one gesture of kindness and solidarity.Q8

Also prominent in the press coverage was the announcement that Canadian and U.S. scientists announced advances in the development of a vaccine against influenza. Q&Scientists could decode the genetic sequence of the virus, which will be crucial in the elaboration of a vaccine.Q8

¶10. (U) ECONOMIC IMPACT

--The Tourism Secretariat and the Tourist Promotion Council are already working on a set of measures to stimulate tourism. Currently, the tourism sector is measuring the damages caused by the H1N1 flu outbreak in hotels, airlines, cruises and congresses/seminars.

--The demand for canned and frozen food, detergents and soap increased during the past week. The press reported that the prices of some of these products also rose and some companies were forced to increase their production lines to meet the larger demand. Other companies said they had enough stock and they only delivered before the scheduled time.

--Restaurants were among the most affected businesses last week. Yesterday they began to open at 50% of their capacity, but today the Mexico City government authorized them to conduct business as usual provide they took all the actions already announced by the government. According to the association of franchises, sales dropped by 90%.

--The alert also had a negative impact on facilities leased

for baptisms, weddings, parties, etc. Large party and conference rooms have said they had losses of USD 228,000.

--The Pacific Airport Group reported that due to the economic recession and the flu it lost about 15.3% of passengers flows. The group expects more losses in the coming months until the perception of Mexico's effective controls of the epidemic changes abroad.

--Despite the government's incentives to attract cruises to Mexican shores, the industry does not expect to come back until the sanitary alert is over. Carnival announced that it will resume its routes to Cozumel on June 15.

--The Confederation of National Trade Chambers (Concanaco) said that sales have declined by 60% and that their income has fallen by USD 625 million. The services and tourism sectors have reported losses for more than USD 337 million. The most affected have been the micro, small and medium-sized businesses, such as restaurants, bars, gyms, etc. The industry is asking for more fiscal stimulus measures.

--The Mexican Council of Foreign Trade (COMCE) reported that Mexican exports are also being discriminated against at foreign borders around the world. Many Mexican shipments are being detained for more than 48 hours in order to allow for exhaustive inspections by customs agents. Because of these delays, COMCE reports that companies are seeing their foreign sales fall by 25%. Exports had already fallen 18% during the first quarter of the year as a result of lower demand in the U.S.

MEXICO 00001269 006 OF 006

--In a joint press release, the governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico asked the world not to use the H1N1 flu as a trade barrier, and reiterated that their governments are doing everything they can to effectively control the outbreak.

--The Fiscal deficit is expected to increase from 1.8% to 2% of GDP - Finance Secretary Carstens acknowledged yesterday in a TV interview that the fiscal deficit would likely rise from the authorized 1.8% to 2% of GDP as a result of the H1N1 outbreak, because of a lower tax collection for about USD 760 million. However, the government does not expect to cut spending this year because it wants to keep stimulating the economy. Carstens said that the government has also kept and will keep foreign and domestic debt under control.

11. (U) TRANSPORTATION

Airlines view favorably the GOM's announcement of economic relief but say more is needed for the aviation sector. Their wish list includes a reduction in landing fees, a cut in the airport use tax assessed on passengers, a subsidy of the price of jet fuel, and a campaign to cleanse the country's flu-sullied image. One airline country manager notes he expects Cancun to move aggressively and lead the recovery -- cutting prices, recruiting tourists, and refilling empty airplanes. The same contact cited resumption of port calls by cruise lines as a key indicator by which to measure returning confidence.

12. (U) POLITICAL IMPACT

No new information to report.

13. (U) U.S. ASSISTANCE

The Charge and senior CDC and OFDA representatives delivered remarks during a Ceremony of Appreciation at the Secretariat

of Health on May 7. The remarks thanked the GOM for its hard work and openness during this crisis and pledged continued US assistance. During the ceremony, Mauricio Hernández, Assistant Secretary for Health, acknowledged the 400,176 doses of Tamiflu and the 7 million dollars donated by the USG. He also gave special thanks to the U.S. for keeping our 3000 mile long border open.

Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap/> /
BASSETT